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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2485
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0879
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2878
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2263
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000359

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: CONFLICT OVER WATER HIGHLIGHTS KYRGYZ-TAJIK BORDER
UNCERTAINTY

Ref: 07 Bishkek 833

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Classified by CDA Lee Litzenberger for Reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (C) Summary: On March 27, approximately 150 Tajiks reportedly crossed the border into Batken oblast to try to open a dam and restore the flow of water to their fields. While local officials resolved the immediate dispute, the incident highlights continuing tensions over access to water and border demarcation. On April 2, PolOffs met with MP Murat Jurayev, a native of Batken oblast and the loudest voice in parliament on the border issues with Tajikistan. Jurayev outlined the sources of conflict along the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border and Tajikistan's Vorukh enclave, and discussed a bill he has proposed to improve economic conditions in hopes of reversing the Kyrgyzstani exodus from Batken. End Summary.

Batken-Isfara Incident Highlights Resource Issue

12. (SBU) A March 27 confrontation over access to water between Tajikistan's Isfara district and Kyrgyzstan's Batken oblast highlighted the tensions along the poorly demarcated border. According to press reports, the incident began when approximately 150 Tajiks crossed the border "accompanied by law-enforcement personnel," according to the Kyrgyz Border Service, with the intention of destroying a dam. The Tajiks were reportedly upset that Kyrgyzstan had not discharged water for irrigation to the Tajik side of the border for four days, which Kyrgyz officials attributed to maintenance work on a canal. Kyrgyz Border Guards claimed the Tajiks attacked them while they attempted to film the incident, and left the scene only after the Kyrgyz Border Guards began loading their weapons. Leaders of Batken oblast and Isfara district eventually came to an agreement to open the dam to discharge water.

Tensions along the Border

13. (C) Embassy PolOffs met April 2 with Member of Parliament (MP) Murat Jurayev, a native of Batken, who discussed in detail the problems along Kyrgyzstan's border with Tajikistan, along the northern edge of Batken oblast. He said that over the last three years there have been many problems along this section of border, and he noted three incidents in particular: a 2005 incursion by Tajik border guards and civilians to cut down trees in Kok Tash, which left one Tajik dead after ignoring Kyrgyzstani Border Guard warnings; a second incident in which Tajik border guards stopped the Batken Governor's vehicle and pointed their weapons at him; and third, the March 27 Tajik incursion.

14. (C) Jurayev said that the border disputes were due in large part to multiple maps -- one from the mid-1920s, one from 1958, and another from 1983 -- each showing a different border. Jurayev pointed out the two border areas with the most problems: the westernmost tip of Kyrgyzstan near Kulundu, where he claimed the Tajiks have occupied 2000 hectares of land; and the two miles of the Kyrgyz Isfara valley that separates Tajikistan from the Tajik enclave at Vorukh, and stretching north-northeast along the Tajik border towards Tortkul reservoir. Jurayev categorized the situation near the Vorukh enclave as "violent," with Tajiks occupying the small stretch of land linking the enclave with Tajikistan proper. Jurayev also claimed that the drug traffickers in the northern part of Tajikistan were using their wealth to occupy Kyrgyz land for their large estates.

Catch-22: Water Drives Both Occupation and Conflict

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15. (C) Jurayev opined that the undemarcated area along the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border benefits the Tajiks, and claimed that the Tajik government is in no rush to solve this border problem. He said that the Tajik side of the border is more densely populated with better employment opportunities. Across the border, Kyrgyz are leaving Batken due to high unemployment and poor medical care, and illegally selling their property to Tajiks. Jurayev pointed out that water issues are at the root of both expansion and conflict. He noted that when water is not discharged to meet the needs of the Tajiks, the situation devolves into conflict, such as the March 27 incident. However, he said, the distribution of water from Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan fuels growth for Tajikistan, and leads to further expansion into Kyrgyz lands.

Party Politics, Ignorance Block Bill on Batken

16. (C) Jurayev, a member of the centrist Social Democratic Party, is the sponsor of a bill he hopes will improve economic conditions in Batken and stem the exodus. He said the bill was specifically aimed to provide incentives for Kyrgyz citizens to remain in twelve villages, with provisions for low-interest loans of \$10,000 to help support families, a land tax exemption, low rates for electricity (particularly for industry), doubling of teacher and civil servant pay, and free education at universities, particularly for those pursuing careers in medicine and teaching. He added that those receiving free education would then, upon return to Batken, have to register monthly to show they are still residing and working in Batken oblast. The bill, however, was rejected by parliamentary review committees and is currently in revision; he hopes to bring the bill forward again in May. Jurayev blamed party politics and the fact that few politicians have ever traveled to remote Batken province for the initial rejection of the bill.

Comment

17. (C) Disputes over land and water between Kyrgyz and Tajiks date back to the Soviet era, and the March 27 incident highlights the continuing problems over border demarcation and scarce resources. Disputed water rights also create tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and water is a potential source of conflict in Central Asia. Batken officials and civil society leaders have previously told us of neglect by the central government, economic difficulties, concerns over Tajik encroachment, and the need for better water management (reftel). But resolving demarcation issues, agreeing on water use, and improving economic conditions in Batken will not happen soon. In the meantime, there are likely to be additional similar incidents along the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border.

LITZENBERGER